WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for maintaining a link between a first network entity and a second network entity, wherein the first network entity includes a network adapter and a driver, comprising:

determining, with the network adapter, whether the driver was loaded before a link-shutdown timer expired, wherein the link-shutdown timer is associated with the link;

continuing processing without dropping the link, with the network adapter, in response to the driver being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired; and

dropping the link, with the network adapter, in response to the driver not being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired.

2. The method of claim 1, further performing:

determining, with the network adapter, whether a register has a value indicating that the driver has been loaded.

3. The method of claim 1, further performing:

determining, with the network adapter, whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining, with the network adapter, whether the driver was loaded in response to determining that the link-shutdown timer has not expired.

4. The method of claim 1, further performing:

determining, with the network adapter, whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining, with the network adapter, whether the driver was loaded in response to the driver not being loaded and the link-shutdown timer not having expired.

5. A method implemented in a driver executing in a first network entity for maintaining a link between the first network entity and a second network entity, wherein the driver performs:

starting a link-shutdown timer for dropping a link;

upon being reloaded, determining whether the link is available; and

continuing processing without renegotiating the link in response to the link being available.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the driver further performs:

renegotiating the link in response to the link being available.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the driver further performs:

determining, whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to stop sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein after the driver is reloaded, the driver further performs:

determining whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to start sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

9. The method of claim 5, further performing:

when the driver is reloaded, disabling the link-shutdown timer in response to the link-shutdown timer being enabled and not being expired.

10. A system coupled to a network and data storage, comprising:

a storage controller managing Input/Output (I/O) access to the data storage;

at least one driver;

a network adapter; and

control logic to cause the network adapter to perform operations, the operations comprising:

(i) determining, with the network adapter, whether the driver was loaded before a link-shutdown timer expired;

(i) continuing processing without dropping a link for which the link-shutdown timer was started in response to the driver being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired; and

(iii) dropping the link in response to the driver not being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired.

11. The network adapter of claim 10, wherein the operations caused by the control logic further comprise:

determining whether a register has a value indicating that the driver has been loaded.

12. The network adapter of claim 10, wherein the operations caused by the control logic further comprise:

determining whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining whether the driver was loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired in response to determining that the link-shutdown timer has not expired.

13. The network adapter of claim 10, wherein the operations caused by the control logic further comprise:

determining whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining whether the driver was loaded in response to the driver not being loaded and the link-shutdown timer not having expired.

14. A system coupled to a network and data storage, comprising:

a processor;

a storage controller managing Input/Output (I/O) access to the data storage; and

a driver, executed by the processor, to perform operations, the operations comprising:

(i) starting a link-shutdown timer for dropping a link;

(iii) upon being reloaded, determining whether the link is available; and

(iii) continuing processing without renegotiating the link in response to the link being available.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the operations further comprise:

renegotiating the link in response to the link not being available.

16. The system of claim 14, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to stop sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein after the driver is loaded, the operations further comprise:

determining whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to start sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

18. The system of claim 14, wherein the operations further comprise:

when the driver is reloaded, disabling the link-shutdown timer in response to the link-shutdown timer being enabled and not being expired.

19. An article of manufacture for maintaining a link between a first computer and a network entity, wherein the first computer includes a network adapter and a driver, and wherein the article of manufacture causes operations to be performed in the network adapter, the operations comprising:

(i) determining, with the network adapter, whether the driver was loaded before a link-shutdown timer expired, wherein the link-shutdown timer is associated with the link;

(i) continuing processing without dropping the link in response to the driver being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired; and

(iii) dropping the link in response to the driver not being loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired.

20. The article of manufacture of claim 19, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining whether a register has a value indicating that the driver has been loaded.

21. The article of manufacture of claim 19, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining whether the driver was loaded before the link-shutdown timer expired in response to determining that the link-shutdown timer has not expired.

22. The article of manufacture of claim 19, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining whether the link-shutdown timer has expired; and

periodically determining whether the driver was loaded in response to the driver not being loaded and the link-shutdown timer not having expired.

23. An article of manufacture for maintaining a link between a first computer and a network entity, wherein the first computer includes a driver, and wherein the article of manufacture causes operations to be performed in the driver, the operations comprising:

starting a link-shutdown timer for dropping a link;

upon being reloaded, determining whether the link is available; and

continuing processing without renegotiating the link in response to the link being available.

24. The article of manufacture of claim 23, wherein the operations further comprise:

renegotiation the link in response to the link not being available.

25. The article of manufacture of claim 23, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining, whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to stop sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

26. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein after the driver is loaded, the operations further comprise:

determining whether flow control is enabled; and

sending an indicator to the second network entity to indicate that the second network entity is to start sending data packets to the first network entity in response to flow control being enabled.

27. The article of manufacture of claim 23, wherein the operations further comprise:

when the driver is reloaded, disabling the link-shutdown timer in response to the link-shutdown timer being enabled and not having expired.